

Joining EU Would Limit Individual Freedom

Petr Mach

In June 2003, the voters in the Czech Republic will go to the ballots to express whether they wish their country to join the European Union. The advocates of liberty will have to consider the impact of such a step on the amount of freedom in the country.

From a liberal standpoint, it seems that the best solution would be to have a free access to the EU market, without paying or receiving money from the EU budget and without having to implement EU regulations. As there is no such alternative, we have to choose between membership and non-membership. The challenge in the referendum will be to decide which alternative would be closest to the ideal. What is the EU membership actually about? The main attributes of the European Union are **a common budget, single market, common legislation and a shift of sovereignty from nation states to the European Union.**

1. Common budget

The Czech Republic will pay at least CZK 25 billion to the common budget, with the Czech government hoping that it would get back at least the same amount from the EU, so that the country does not get a rotten deal. **Given that the EU takes 5 per cent of the budget for its own administration alone, it is very unlikely that in the long run the Czech Republic should receive more than it gives.** If the EU accepted countries of which most are poorer than the Czech Republic, the country would soon end up being a net contributor. Sooner or later it would not only pay the price of the Brussels bureaucracy, but also that of French or Polish farmers and Greek or Slovak roads. The common budget is an instrument of supranational redistribution, which as yet has never brought anything positive.

2. Single market

The single market, rid of customs and import quotas, would undoubtedly be beneficial. But the **trade liberalization between EU members is only apparent. Instead of import quotas, the EU sets outright production quotas for each member country. The slogan about free trade in an area with population of 0.5 billion is a humbug. Trading only what the central authority allows to be produced is not a free trade.** Moreover, the EU market is more closed outwards than today's Czech market and stronger barriers encumber its import of non-European goods. It is also known that the agreed enlargement conditions would not bring a truly free trade between the CR and the rest of the EU, at least during the "transitional period".

3. Common legislation

The common legislation means directives and regulations issued in Brussels, each of them virtually limiting freedom in some respect. The EU will tell us how much potato starch we may produce and how many pigs are we allowed to rear. It will set compulsory sizes for cages in our poultry farms, noise limits for blenders, length of guarantee period for goods. It will decide whether we are allowed to sell aspirin and what minimum taxes we should pay. The Czech legislators will have negligible influence on such legislation; we will fulfil the wishes of others. Sometimes we hear that by joining the EU we have nothing to lose, as we have already implemented more or less all of the European legislation. But we should realize that we have not yet implemented the legislation that has not been created, and that if we preserve our national sovereignty, i.e. not join the EU, we will be able to cancel the already-implemented bad laws or decrees whenever we want.

4. Loss of national sovereignty

Joining the EU means losing national sovereignty. **By becoming a member of the European Union, the Czech Republic will undertake to accept legislation issued at the European level.** This entails several pitfalls for the freedom of the individual. First, the shift of sovereignty from nation states to the EU means suppressing competition between states. But only the competition of fiscal and regulatory laws allows efficient decreasing of the amount of taxation and regulation. Second, the enlargement of the domain of central political decision-making hinders any

change in policy. **The supranational European Union means essentially a paralysis of democracy. National elections will become a mock, since no matter who wins the elections in the Czech Republic, the European representation will remain average.** What will be the sense of elections if the crucial regulatory and fiscal parameters are set in Brussels? Third, we are aware that any government measure that goes beyond the guarantee of an individual's right to life and property is a violation of such rights. **Only the free exchange is a relationship that is advantageous for both parties. Political redistribution and regulation is always advantageous for ones at the cost of the others. In a supranational European Union, individual rights of some nations will be sacrificed to those of other nations. And throughout history, such state of affairs has always led to serious international conflicts.**

It is beyond doubt that the membership of the Czech Republic in the European Union would weaken individual freedom and brings more socialism to this country. Until the European Union transforms into a free trade area based on voluntary cooperation, the advocates of liberty will have only one rational alternative: to preserve national sovereignty and promote liberal principles within the Czech Republic.

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